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ABSTRACT

Intended as a synthesis of current literature on school improvement and educational change, this guide attempts to provide central office personnel, principals, teachers, and parents with an overview of five school improvement models, along with practical suggestions for improving instructional programs. The second chapter summarizes relevant literature, focusing on two themes: the actors in the change process and impediments to change. Specifically discussed are district administrators' and principals' roles in the change process, principals' strategies for coping with change, the effect of teacher and administrator career paths on innovation, and "top-down" versus "bottom-up" change. The third chapter examines five school improvement models (the Structure of School Improvement, Onward to Excellence, Program Development Evaluation, School-Based Improvement, and the School Improvement Process) and summarizes common program characteristics. The final chapter presents qualifying assumptions (including the need for multilevel cooperation and strategies for managing the slowly evolving change process) and seven recommendations: (1) fostering an attitude favorable to change; (2) broadening participation; (3) identifying and defining problem areas and key school effectiveness research elements; (4) deciding on long-range goals; (5) developing an information and feedback system; (6) anticipating obstacles and ways to overcome them; and (7) promoting a spirit of collaboration among participants. A bibliography of 40 references is included. (MLH)

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TRENDS & ISSUES

A series of papers highlighting recent developments in research and practice in educational management

A Consumer's Guide to School Improvement

Geoffrey E. Mills

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Foreword

Acknowledging that there is no one "best model" for school improvement, Geoffrey Mills, in this fourth issue of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management's Trends and Issues Series, describes five representative models. His purpose is to give the consumers of those models —school officials, teachers, and the public—a wealth of information that they can use to select the approach that best suits their particular situation.

Adding to the usefulness of his "consumers' guide," Mills also reviews the extensive body of literature on school improvement and the broader category of educational change, looking for principles that govern the improvement process.

Mills is assistant professor of education at Southern Oregon State College. Before moving to the United States in 1986 to complete a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction at the University of Oregon, he attended university in Australia and was awarded a Diploma of Teaching, Bachelor of Education, Graduate Diploma in Curriculum and Educational Technology, and Master of Education from the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University of Technology) in Perth, Australia.

His doctoral dissertation focused on strategies used by central office personnel, principals, and teachers as they managed and coped with multiple innovations

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Introduction

Central to understanding school improvement is knowledge about how new programs are implemented and what outcomes can be attributed to their adoption. The process and function of educational change are topics that have the potential to help educators understand what actually changes as the result of state, district, and school attempts to improve educational programs.

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize current literature on school improvement and educational change. However, given the breadth of the literature that addresses models and processes of school improvement, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with all endeavors. An initial ERIC search provided 202 references that focus on the process of school improvement; subsequently I received many other handbooks and resource guides used by school districts throughout the country. Despite this prolific literature, absolute principles are hard to come by, as Shoemaker (1984) attests:

> School improvement is complex, it takes time and hard work. There are no guarantees. No one set of activities automatically will turn a lower achieving school into a higher achieving one. The substantial and growing research base can suggest only which practices and policies are more likely to help schools improve. In the final analysis, school improvement is dependent upon the encouragement, support and resources of boards of education and the communities they serve, and the knowledge, understanding, openness to change and abilities of administrators and teachers. (p. 8)

Rationale for This Guide

The question arises, Why not simply describe the best plan for how to improve schools? But as Bruce R. Joyce, Richard H. Hersh, and Michael McKibbin (1983) state,

> The answer is, there simply is no best model for a school. Every approach to education has costs as well as benefits. There are many effective models for schooling, but they do not work equally well for all children, nor do they achieve all purposes to the same degree. We must decide on our purposes and look realistically at the children before we can create the best plan. Over time our children and our purposes change, so we have to repeat our planning regularly. (p. 9)

Instead of trying to describe one "best model," the rationale for this guide is to provide central office personnel, principals, teachers, and parents with an overview of *five* school improvement models, along with lessons from those models that will help their efforts to improve instructional programs. Using the guide, school personnel can decide on the model that best fits the needs of their students. All five models, representative of the most effective plans for school improvement, exemplify a school-based, data-driven approach to changing schools.

In looking at the history of school reform in the United States, Ralph Tyler (1987) makes a compelling argument for school-based decision-making and school improvement efforts directed at the local district level:

> A significant change in the operation of a school requires changes in teachers' attitudes and practices as well as changes in other parts of the teaching/learning system. Teachers teach what they understand, what they believe is important, and what they believe they convey successfully. Clearly, teachers are the most significant factor in implementing a school reform....
>
> In my work on school improvement, I have found that it takes six or seven years to get a reform really working as intended. Most implementation plans greatly underestimate the amount of time required....
>
> Improvement in the educational effectiveness of a given school depends largely on the efforts of that school's personnel and parents. By starting to identify school problems and seek effective solutions, parents and school personnel can set

> in motion a significant "reform movement" that can yield constructive outcomes. (p. 280)

If we accept the premise that changing the outcomes of schooling is slow, complex, and difficult to achieve at the classroom level, the question then arises, Why change at all?

Michael Huberman and Matthew Miles (1984) addressed this fundamental question in their study of educational innovation: Should schools try to improve at all?

> Of course changes for the better are to be desired. But change can also be disruptive and wasteful of resources; it may be far more important at any given point for a school to be doing a good job with familiar, well-tested instructional practices that have stood the test of time. Innovations always disrupt people's working lives to some extent. (p. 280)

Arguably, changes "for the better" should be attempted if those persons involved in education are committed to striving for excellence in educational outcomes and the best possible learning experiences for children. In this context, I have interpreted educational innovation as specific planned improvement. Perhaps a model for school improvement agreed upon by faculty and community consensus can minimize disruption to people's working lives.

Current Trends

There appears to be a dearth of literature dealing with current numbers of, and approaches used in, school improvement efforts under way in the United States. Most of the participants actively involved in school improvement do not publish accounts of their efforts.

Michael Cohen (1987) points out that the 1980s have witnesssed a rapid growth in the effective schools movement and a subsequent growth in the body of literature dealing with schooling practices that influence student outcomes. Citing a study by Miles and Kaufman (1985), Cohen maintains that

> there are nearly 40 effective schools programs operating in some 1,750 school districts and almost 7,500 schools in virtually every state in the country. This is double the number found in a 1983 study (Miles, Farrar, and Neufield, 1983), and every sign suggests that such programs will continue to spread rapidly in the coming years. (p. 474)

More recently, the General Accounting Office (1989), reporting the results of a survey conducted during the 1987-88 school year, documented the spreading influence of the effective schools movement. Of the districts responding, about 6,500 (41 percent) reported having effective schools programs, and 83 percent of these districts indicated that they began their programs after 1984. Because of a lack of objective data, the researchers were unable to evaluate the extent to which the programs are improving school outcomes.

Preview

The following chapter reviews (albeit selectively) literature on the factors that affect educational change and school improvement, for the process of school improvement invariably attempts to change existing school practices. Next is an overview of five models of school improvement: The Structure of School Improvement, Onward to Excellence, Program Development Evaluation, School-Based Improvement, and School Improvement Process. The final chapter discusses recommendations from the literature that may guide school personnel in selecting a model most suitable for their situation.

If the consumers of school improvement models are to change established practices, I believe it is important that they become aware of the many factors that will enhance or inhibit their change efforts. It is with the aim of helping those parties with an interest in school improvement—central office personnel, principals, teachers, and parents—achieve constructive outcomes from their improvement efforts that this paper is directed.

Educational Change and School Improvement

This chapter focuses on two bodies of literature: educational change and the process of school improvement. As a means of organizing the synthesis of the literature, I have focused on two major themes: actors in the change process and impediments to change. Two additional sections examine obstacles to change and processes of change.

The Actors in the Change Process

School district officials, principals, and teachers all play active roles in the school improvement process. The following sections discuss the role of district administrators in successful change efforts, the role of the principal, principals' strategies for coping with change, the effect of teachers' and administrators' career paths on innovation, and "top-down" versus "bottom-up" change.

District Administrators and Successful Change

In his discussion of district administrators and their roles in successful change, Michael Fullan (1982) identifies eight steps that he considers to be the process necessary for improved implementation of innovations:

> They must lead a process which (1) tests out the need and priority of the change; (2) determines the potential appropriateness of the particular innovation for addressing the need; (3) clarifies, supports, and insists on the role of principals and other administrators as central to implementation; (4) ensures that direct implementation support is provided in the form of available quality materials, in-service training, one-to-one technical help, and opportunity for peer interaction; (5) allows for certain redefinition and adaptation of the innovation; (6) communicates with and maintains the support of parents and the school board; (7) sets up an information-gathering system to monitor and correct implementation problems; and (8) has a realistic time perspective. (p. 166)

Undoubtedly this list presents a tall order for any district administrator, yet Fullan argues that such an approach can be implemented to successfully effect change.

The Role of the Principal in Educational Change

The literature on the role of principals in educational change is clear on one main point: whether they support or inhibit change, by the nature of their role in schools principals have an impact on the change process. But it would also seem that the role is idiosyncratic. Fullan (1982) contends that the majority of principals in North America are not instructional leaders in their schools, but that administrative management is the most common category in which they function. In Fullan's words:

> The reference to the management of routine matters is particularly revealing in light of the frequent finding that many principals are preoccupied with administrative detail and routine. (p. 139)

Fullan summarizes his findings on the role and impact of the principal in the change process as follows:

1. A large number of principals (at least half) operate as administrators and ad hoc crisis managers.
2. Principals who do become involved in the change process do so as instructional leaders or facilitative instructional leaders.
3. Due to great demands on their time, the most effective role for principals is probably as a

facilitator or coordinator of change.

4. The research does not indicate that the principal is the most important person in the change process. However, whether it is direct or indirect, the principal does play a fateful role in the implementation and continuity of any change effort. (1982, p. 140)

Alternatively, Seymour Sarason (1982) has argued that the "system" provides the individual principal with a scapegoat for explaining stability in his or her school. That is, the principal's view of the system serves as a foundation for inaction and stability, or merely a convenient target to which the blame for any action can be assigned. Observing this tendency of principals to maintain the status quo in schools, Harry Wolcott (1974) has raised a number of issues relevant to the manner in which elementary principals managed and coped with change. Wolcott questioned the penchant of public schools for change and the notion "that anything 'old' is suspect and that 'changed' is automatically assumed to be 'improved'" (p. 201). Wolcott described the "live" elementary school as

> in a constant state of change without anyone having to do anything to induce or encourage the process.... Regardless of what he *says* about the desirability of creating a climate for change, the principal already lives with incessant change as a way of life. (p. 202; emphasis in original)

Further, he contends that as a reaction to the inevitability of change in his or her role, the principal attempts to constrain and contain the ever-changing school:

> For it may be that the only way one can hope to maintain control in a system which is inherently so volatile and constantly changing in some dimensions—in this case, its personnel—is to exert all the influence one can in reducing the potential variety which might enter the system via routes more amenable to restraint. Although it represents a curious paradox between their ideal and actual roles as "agents of change" if principals actually serve to constrain rather than to facilitate the dynamic aspects of formal education, that is exactly the paradox that I am suggesting here. (p. 202)

Wolcott's notion that principals may have their greatest impact on education not as agents of change but as "advocates of constraint" would appear to be one possible explanation for the manner in which principals manage a district's directive to develop school improvement plans.

Principals' Involvement with Change Facilitating Teams

Gene Hall (1987) has argued that principals can make a significant difference in terms of teachers' success in implementing curriculum innovations. In particular, he contends that principals' behaviors are interrelated with the intervention behaviors of other change facilitators from within and outside the school. According to Hall,

> principals do not lead change efforts single-handedly. Rather, principals work with other change facilitators, who, in most cases, are making a large number of interventions also.... the key is not merely having other change facilitators active at the school site; the important difference seems to be related to how well the principal and these other change facilitators work together as a *Change Facilitating Team*. It appears now that it is this team of facilitators, under the lead of the principal, that makes successful change happen in schools. (p. 2; emphasis in original)

The models of school improvement discussed in the following chapter reflect the importance of principals' working collaboratively with central office personnel, teachers, and community members.

Principals' Strategies for Coping with Change

Fullan (1982) has suggested nine ways principals can cope with change proposals, a summary of which is presented below:

1. Critically reflect on whether the conception of the role is placing unnecessary limits on what can be done.
2. Determine the extent to which the district administration supports and really expects the principal to play a major role in the implementation of change.
3. For any given change, assess whether it

potentially addresses a program need, as seen by teachers, parents, district administrators, and so forth.

4. For any given change, attempt to determine why the district administration is proposing it. One of the important indicators is whether there are resources allocated for implementation—not unlimited resources, but enough to indicate that the administration is serious about the change. Lack of resources may not reflect lack of seriousness.
5. In considering needs, and the motivation for adopting a change, determine whether the change is a high priority relative to other changes. There is a limitation to how many innovations can be handled at once.
6. In assessing the need for change, talk to teachers about their views. If many teachers recognize the need, or if there is a serious problem, set up a change process. Knowledge and conceptions of the change process and corresponding planning are a necessary foundation to which must be added some knowledge or familiarity with the content of the change and communication and interpersonal skills.
7. Seek opportunities for personal/professional development and informal/formal exchanges with fellow principals about what principals are and should be doing.
8. In reacting to some particular changes that seem unrealistic or meaningless, discuss the meaning of the change with teachers and fellow principals.
9. If all changes seem senseless, or if there is no interest in program change, go back to critically reflect on whether your own conception of the role is placing unnecessary limits on what can be done. (1982, p. 144)

Wolcott (1977, pp. 213-28) has proposed an inventory of strategies used by principals ("technocrats") for imposing change under the contrasting styles of "soft sell" and "hard sell."

Soft Sell

Maintaining the Status Quo. With this strategy, administrators share the technocratic commitment to change but give as little time and energy as possible to implementation of the proposed change. An alternative strategy involves stressing the similarity between the proposed change and existing practices in the district.

Providing Options. This strategy involves providing teachers with options regarding the speed with which they incorporate the proposed change into their instructional programs. A variation on this strategy is to involve teachers in decision-making using a group process.

Appealing or Persuading. "Collective professional appeal" accompanying a proposed innovation may either be intrinsic in the innovation itself or a deliberate strategy to encourage teachers to use something new. "Practical appeal" accompanies professional appeal, but stresses immediate payoffs to the user. The principal may provide "differential rewards" as a means of encouragement for program participation. "Offering to run interference" makes explicit reference to what each party is expected to give in exchange. "Positive impression management" refers to a strategy of directing "visitors" interested in a change effort to certain schools or teachers to create the impression that the change is successful. "Helping" refers to the provision of workshops and inservices for teachers to help with the implementation of an innovation.

Hard Sell

Exercise of Authority. This strategy concerns the issuing of "directives and mandates" and the manner in which the person who gives an order can back it up. "Infiltrating the teachers' ranks" refers to the conscious efforts of technocrats to coopt teachers into management, or to increase involvement in the formal business of teachers. "Deliberately withholding information is a strategy that goes well beyond the attempt to create a positive impression." Delaying information that could be used for teacher decision-making is another strategy. "Stalling" refers to the technocratic tactic of being slow to share information with teachers, or assigning teachers' issues to a low priority on meeting agendas. "Threat and intimidation" refer to hard-sell behaviors that border on abuse of authority. "The use of sanctions" refers not only to the possible use of sanctions, but the threat of their use.

Authoritative Retreat. Wolcott contends that

this hard-sell behavior completes the full circle of strategies used by technocrats to maintain the status quo. "Looking into the problem" refers to the forming of ad hoc committees and study groups to consider a problem. Although no action may eventuate, it is an acknowledgement that a problem may exist. "Declaring a moratorium" refers to the second step in the "retreat sequence" during which time work on an innovation ceases. The final step in the retreat sequence is "reinterpreting the innovation." This refers to attempts by technocrats to link the innovation to the status quo.

Matthew Miles (1986) has proposed a list of coping strategies similar to those described by Wolcott. Miles based his list of twenty-three coping strategies on a qualitative study of five urban high schools attempting school improvement. According to Miles, managing and coping strategies range from relatively shallow, soft, informal, and less-penetrating interventions to those that are deeper, more structurally oriented, more deliberate, and more person-changing in their effects. Miles clustered the twenty-three strategies under eight general "styles":

1. Do nothing. This style was reflected in a strategy of "no coping."
2. Temporize. This style was characterized by strategies of delay and avoidance.
3. Do it the usual way. This style of coping with a problem involved "short-run" coping strategies such as improvising solutions and stopgaps, using an existing group of people to address the problem, and shuffling people around to deal with the problem.
4. Ease off. This style referred to attempts to modify the innovation to meet the needs of the school.
5. Do it harder. This style is characterized by the use of strategies such as providing symbolic support for a district mandate, providing rewards and incentives for involvement in a program, and pressuring teachers to participate in the development and implementation of a program.
6. Build personal capacity. This style is reflected in the strategy of providing help and training for teachers.
7. Building system capacity. This style incorporates six strategies: defining new roles (for example, appointing a program coordinator), creating new arenas in which groups can interact, articulating an image of where the program is going, monitoring the progress of a program, revising plans on the basis of monitoring, and using assistance of outside help for problem solving.
8. Add new people and redesign the system. This style is reflected in strategies such as restaffing, increasing local control over resources, "empowering" and team building, redesigning the roles of those persons involved with the innovation, and redesigning the organization.

Miles's managing and coping strategies—similar to those behaviors described by Wolcott—provide another perspective on the variety of managing and coping strategies used by principals.

Effect of Careers Paths on Innovation

Louis M. Smith, Paul F. Kleine, John J. Prunty, and David C. Dwyer (1986) have provided an indepth analysis of career patterns among "innovative educators." In a long-term study of the careers of innovative educators, Smith and his colleagues maintain that the usual pattern has been to view careers of successful individuals advancing up the ladder in terms of "hierarchically ordered, vertical, or ranked positions." But of importance to this discussion of school improvement is the authors' thesis that "careers seem an important entry to a deeper understanding of educational innovation and change" (p. 28).

Similarly, Michael Huberman (1988) has attempted to combine research on teaching careers and school improvement in an effort to answer questions about how schools can be improved. According to Huberman,

> The "school improvement" literature has had a narrower perspective, so that each innovation has been construed as a time-bound process, with little or no concern being shown for the prior and subsequent careers of the actors involved. It is clear, however, that one strand can usefully inform the other. (p. 119)

Huberman proposes that experiences of school improvement influence teachers' careers and that much can be learned about teachers' career progressions through a life-cycle perspective on teacher involvement in school improvement efforts.

In reviewing the teacher career literature, Huberman suggests that the life-cycle research identifies factors within and outside the school that help us to understand how teachers' careers develop:

> These studies do not focus on the experience or the influence of attempts to improve professional practices. After all, large-scale innovations are only moments, however intense and significant, in 40-odd years of activity; they constitute a few brief episodes in a professional and personal biography, one of several events in a life phase, and are rooted in a biography that makes them momentous or trivial according to the issues and energy they activate at the moment of their occurrence. (1988, p. 120)

Huberman states that the research on school improvement, in contrast, has failed to take into consideration the professional lives of teachers and administrators involved in the process of changing local school practices:

> When one overlooks people's lives to focus on events—and large-scale school improvement efforts are mostly just that—or on the institutional theatres of those events, one is taking the actors out of the play and assuming that the scenery is animate enough to carry the plot and account for the denouement. (p. 120)

Furthermore, Huberman reports the findings of a life-cycle study conducted in Switzerland that broadly considered the impact of school improvement efforts on teachers' careers. According to Huberman, informants in the study identified distinct phases and affixed thematic titles to each: (1) metaphorical themes ("drowning," "settling down," "disenchantment," "getting my second wind"); (2) administrative themes ("during my training," "getting tenure," "moving into the upper secondary"); and (3) historical themes that had to do with major structural reforms in the school system or with historical events having an impact on school life.

Huberman concluded that innovations affect, and are affected by, the career cycle. Once a teacher has consolidated his or her basic instructional repertoire, he makes a concerted effort to extend those skills and to seek out and remove institutional constraints that impede progress. Later on in a teacher's career one would expect a "narrowing of interests" and reduction in the energy invested in pursuing innovations.

Perhaps one of the most distressing aspects of Huberman's findings is the implication that it will continue to be difficult to change school practices, if indeed such changes are warranted. Some teachers will be happy to watch their colleagues carry the burden of an innovation long enough to see if the efforts are worthwhile and if the innovation can live up to its promises. Huberman concludes:

> The Swiss teachers seem to be saying that these promises are, typically, not kept, and that it makes more sense to invest modestly in enacting changes within their own classrooms or to shift their energies to outside the school. (p. 130)

In considering the models of school improvement presented in this paper, administrators and teachers themselves should try to discern the models' effects on the careers of individual educators, and vice versa. Clearly, those of us involved in school improvement efforts cannot ignore the impact that personal career paths have on innovation outcomes.

"Top-Down" Versus "Bottom-Up" Change

The literature on educational change has discussed the relative benefits of "top-down" versus "bottom-up" change efforts for many years (see Cuban 1984; Fullan 1982, 1985). Shirley Hord, William Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene Hall (1987) have provided a neutral view of the issues surrounding the debate:

> We do not engage in the debate except to observe that we have seen both approaches work successfully. Obviously a change or improvement endeavor that originates with a single teacher or small group of teachers, who believe in the change and persuade the entire faculty of the worthiness of the change, has the advantage of a committed core of teachers. When change begins at a higher level—at the principal's desk

> or in the central office—there is a different kind of advantage: the possibility for more change to occur more rapidly if appropriate kinds of interventions are provided.... The important factor in all cases, whether at the single teacher level or at the level of all teachers across a district is the support and assistance provided to make the change. (p. 8)

Administrative support is crucial, and while such support may be lost in the models of school improvement described in the next chapter, I believe that it is a significant factor in the success of any attempt to change schools.

David Crandall, Jeffrey Eiseman, and Karen Louis (1986) acknowledge conflicting findings dealing with the issue of whether to develop innovations at the local level or to import them from elsewhere. Part of the confusion surrounding the resolution of this problem focuses on the definition of *local*, for it appears that teachers view anything brought in from the district office equally as foreign as programs developed in another country. However, the data suggest that the professional and working conditions of teaching are such that it should not be assumed that involving teachers in program development will necessarily lead to better programs. Crandall and his colleagues suggest that the following conditions need to be in place for effective involvement to lead to success:

1. Teachers should be provided with additional resources such as release time during the regular school day.
2. The teachers to be involved should be self-selected and highly motivated, and be capable of integrating theory and experience.
3. Teachers should have access to outside experts who can help them with the developmental process.
4. The school or district should not be in a hurry for change. Teacher development is a time-consuming process that if rushed is likely to fail. (p. 29)

The authors have some sobering advice for decision-makers contemplating the extent of teacher involvement in the planning of school improvement efforts: when a major school improvement effort is being considered, teachers should be notified and given the opportunity to participate in the problem identification phase, and the opportunity to participate on an "interested" basis. Further, when a plan is almost in final form teachers should be given the opportunity to evaluate and modify it. Alternatively, an administrator may choose to mandate the adoption of an innovation and attempt to involve teachers in implementation planning:

> Under most circumstances, administrators should not expect teachers to design major change programs without substantial support and leadership, such as assistance from a highly motivated and creative peer, or from an external expert who is genuinely interested in collaborative development. (p. 35)

Crandall and his colleagues also wrestle with the dilemma of "piecemeal" versus the "all-at-once" implementation strategies. Is it wise to start out small and implement components of a program on a small scale, or to elect for complete implementation of an innovation in "demonstration" or "lighthouse" settings? The answers to this question are somewhat reliant on factors such as the readiness of the individual teacher, the readiness of the organizational structure, and the culture of the school. The authors propose that it is not just a case of "piecemeal" versus "all-at-once" strategies but also involves the dilemma of endurance versus strength:

> While the all-at-once strategy requires administrator-teacher relationships that are strong enough for administrators to activate, focus, and support the requisite teacher effort, the piecemeal strategy requires that administrative attention be sustained over a long time span, perhaps ten or more years. (p. 37)

Impediments to Change

In his discussion of the failure of educational innovations, Neal Gross (1979) identified what he considers to be eight important impediments to educational change efforts at the local, state, and federal levels:

- the failure of school systems to carefully diagnose educational problems
- the failure of district administrators to recognize the importance of the implementation

stage of the change process

- the disjointed manner in which school districts have introduced innovations
- an uncritical acceptance of popular educational innovations
- an absence of monitoring and feedback mechanisms
- an absence of teacher and community participation in deliberations about change propositions, inadequate short, intermediate, or long-term targets as part of planning for change
- an absence of leadership (pp. 25-30)

The models examined in this paper reflect concern for overcoming many of these impediments to change.

Ambitious Versus Practical Approaches

Huberman and Miles (1984) addressed the dilemma of a school district adopting a too ambitious innovation compared to a program that had stood the test of time. Huberman and Miles consider that "sustained assistance" is the answer to successful ambitious innovations:

> Ambitious efforts sometimes fell into our "overreaching" scenario, where cutbacks had to be made later on, or "salvaging" operations, where sadder but wiser people picked out pieces of the innovation from the wreckage of their original hopes. There is a case for practicality. But overemphasis on it, resulting in fatally "smooth" early implementation, got our sites little.... Attempt more, get more. But "more" can mean more negative effects as well. One of the clearly important adjuncts of the decision to go the ambitious route is sustained assistance; without it, large-scale programs will simply backfire or wither. (p. 280)

In considering the scope of a school improvement effort, it is important to maintain a balance between ambitious efforts and those requiring little change in the routines of innovation participants.

Committees and Change

Fullan (1982) has argued that one of the great mistakes of educators in the 1960s and 1970s was the naive assumption that involving some teachers on curriculum committees or in program development would help facilitate implementation, because the programs would be accepted by other teachers. Fullan has argued that such involvement of teachers on committees does not necessarily lead to improved implementation:

> As far as most teachers were concerned, when the change was produced by fellow teachers it was just as much externally experienced as if it had come from the university or the government. In fact, it could be more aggravating if teachers who had developed the change were seen as getting special rewards and recognition. (p. 113)

The assertion that committee involvement necessarily contributes to improved implementation of an innovation may be unwarranted.

Classroom Stability

Larry Cuban (1984) has attempted to explain classroom stability in the face of the reforms and changes embraced by American education over the past century. Cuban proposes the following possible explanations for classroom practices that have endured:

> Schools are a form of social control and sorting. The ways schools are organized, the curriculum, and teaching practices mirror the norms of the socioeconomic system....
>
> The organizational structure of the school and classroom drove teachers into adopting instructional practices that changed little over time....
>
> The culture of teaching itself tilts toward stability and a reluctance to change. This culture is shaped by the kinds of people recruited into the classroom.... People who become teachers, according to this explanation, themselves watched teachers for almost two decades before entering their own classrooms. They tend to use those practices that they observed in teachers that taught them....
>
> Ideas about how children develop, the role of the school, classroom authority, and the place of subject matter in instruction determine teaching practices....
>
> What determines instructional practice is

whether or not reforms were effectively implemented in classrooms. (pp. 9-11)

Of the five explanations, the first three account for the durability of teacher-centered instruction, and the last two attempt to explain where change at the classroom level may have occurred. Cuban's explanations for stability in American education provide a useful perspective for viewing the stability in many American school districts. Cuban's argument that effective implementation determines changes in instructional practices denotes another possible explanation for stability in instructional programs and underscores the need for greater emphasis on the implementation phases of school improvement.

Overcoming Obstacles to School Improvement

Perhaps the greatest problem that has to be overcome by practitioners and researchers involved with school improvement efforts is that of implementation. Gary Gottfredson and Denise Gottfredson (1987) suggest a number of principles that might be useful for dealing with obstacles to school improvement:

- Use an assessment of school climate or other form of needs assessment to determine areas of greatest need for improvement.
- Address one obstacle at a time. It is important not to overwhelm school personnel with "bulldozing" approach to change.
- Attempt problem solving in groups involving persons at different levels in the organization, for example, central office personnel, principals, and teachers.
- As an outcome of the problem solving efforts develop a set of "critical benchmarks" that will determine the progress of the innovation in overcoming obstacles.
- Write down and disseminate decisions about policies, plans, and key decisions. It is important to indicate who is to take responsibility, and when, in order to insure the implementation of an innovation. (p.17)

The models examined in this paper reflect a similar concern for overcoming many of these impediments to change.

Processes of Educational Change

The roles of the actors in the change process and the potential obstacles they face obviously affect the strategies they select for implementating change. Fullan (1985) has argued for two school change strategies: an innovation-focused strategy and a school-wide strategy. Combining the insights of these two approaches, Fullan offers guidelines for effective school change, summarized below:

1. Develop a plan. The school, viewed as the unit of change, calls for a plan that will consider how the main organization and process factors will be addressed.
2. Invest in local facilitators. Each school must be assisted by someone trained in supporting an innovation.
3. Allocate resources (money and time). Extra resources and time are required for teachers and others to observe, share, plan, act, and evaluate.
4. Select schools and decide on scope of projects. Only a small number of instructional areas should be addressed at any one time. Whatever the focus of the change effort, the various organizational conditions supporting implementation must be explicitly taken into account.
5. Concentrate on developing the principal's leadership role. Provide training and follow-up support geared specifically to the skills needed for managing/leading a particular change.
6. Focus on instruction and the link to organizational conditions. Effective change strategies should focus on classroom instructional change. That is, an effective school plan will make explicit the relationship between instructional improvements at the classroom level and corresponding organizational and value changes.
7. Stress ongoing staff development and assistance. The assistance required for effective change is of two types: assistance in plan development and implementation, and technical assistance at the level of the class-

room in implementing improvement plans.

8. Ensure information gathering and use. Use both formal and informal systems of information gathering during the first phases of planning and implementation.
9. Plan for continuation and spread. The spread of schoolwide planning to other schools is more difficult than planning for the spread of a single innovation.
10. Review capacity for future changes. At the completion of a school plan the district should assist or support the school in reviewing its experience and capacity for future changes. (For further discussion see Fullan (1985, pp. 414-16.)

Lynne Miller and Ann Lieberman (1988) contrasted the contributions of qualitative and quantitative research to school improvement in the United States. In reviewing the perspectives that have influenced how researchers have looked at schools over the past forty years, the authors identify three main approaches: the technological, political, and culturist perspectives.

In citing the culturist studies of Sarason (1971); Smith and Keith (1971); Smith, Klein, Prunty, and Dwyer (1986); Wolcott (1977); and Huberman and Miles (1984), the authors make the following conclusion:

> If there is a common finding in these culturist studies, it is that schools are complex organizations and that changing them is a complicated, non-linear, somewhat messy endeavor. (Miller and Lieberman 1988, p. 7)

Furthermore, based on the review of selected qualitative and quantitative studies using multiple perspectives, Miller and Lieberman have developed a set of understandings about school improvement summarized below:

1. School improvement must consider the culture of the school, its history, people, "regularities," norms, needs, and values.
2. Change strategies begin where people and places are and slowly help them move in the direction of the change.
3. Change tends not to be a neat, linear, rational process. It is important to have clear goals that will provide a road map for change, but it is important to identify and follow possible detours.
4. Leadership is a critical component in any school improvement effort. Regardless of who demonstrates the leadership, at the central office or school levels, someone or some small group has to take charge of the effort and provide the necessary support for success.
5. Teachers must be given the opportunity for active participation in the change process.
6. Teachers must be supported by resources and materials to use in their classrooms if change is to become a reality.
7. Teachers need time to practice and master new behaviors and must receive support for classroom level implementation efforts.
8. Schools are complex social settings, and the frameworks of values and meanings of participants must be acknowledged in any change effort.
9. If a change effort is to be implemented, and continued over time, it must prove to be beneficial to teachers in terms of their own professional growth and development, and in terms of student outcomes. (p. 11)

This chapter has provided a synthesis of current literature on educational change and school improvement. If central office personnel, principals, teachers, and community members are to make decisions about selecting an appropriate model (process) of school improvement, they need to be aware of the factors that affect change efforts.

Models for the Process of School Improvement

This chapter examines the following models for the process of school improvement: The Structure of School Improvement, Onward to Excellence, Program Development Evaluation, School-Based Improvement, and School Improvement Process. These five models were selected on the basis of their current use throughout the country and the contributions they have made to the school improvement movement in recent years.

The Structure of School Improvement

Bruce Joyce, Richard Hersh, and Michael McKibbin (1983) have proposed a structure of school improvement as a "way of life"; they define *structure* as

> the pattern of relationships among the many individual components of school change: administrative leadership, teacher effectiveness, curriculum improvement, and community involvement. (p. 5)

Joyce and his colleagues argue that school improvement efforts typically lack a coherent structure and that change has been attempted without concern for the "synergistic nature of the complex process called schooling" (p.5). They consider that the social organization of the school contributes to stabilization:

> Such structure creates an insidious form of homeostasis—a resistance to change which functions to separate teachers from the community, administration, and each other, and thus effectively neutralizes almost all attempts at serious innovation.
>
> Schools, like other social organizations, are not disposed toward change and from that emerges an important paradox which provides a clue to the solution to the problem. The paradox is quite simple: schools seek stability as a seemingly necessary condition of survival. Yet this condition of equilibrium is also the root cause of the school's inability to improve, for as society changes and/or pedagogical knowledge increases, schools need to assimilate and accommodate to new realities. How then can a school create a reasonable level of stability and constantly be open and able to change?
>
> The answer lies in the creation of a certain type of school culture, i.e., a set of organizational norms, expectations, beliefs, and behaviors which allow the establishment of activities fundamental to school improvement. This means that what must remain constant, what must remain stable in the life of the school, is the emotional and intellectual dispositions toward improvement on the part of the Responsible Parties. We call this condition homeostasis of improvement. (p. 6)

The "Responsible Parties" in charge of school improvement—teachers, parents, administrators, and community representatives—are seen as acting together with the common goal of improving the quality of the school.

Three Stages

Joyce and his colleagues identify three stages of school improvement that they consider to be fundamental to the process and representative of successive stages of growth: refinement, renovation, and redesign (see table 1). In stage 1, the operation of the school is viewed in light of school effectiveness criteria. Curriculum and instructional practices are evaluated and program refinements developed to make them more effective.

In stage 2, curriculum areas are examined in greater detail and specific components of the innovation are chosen as the focus of improvement efforts. "New content and teaching strate-

Table 1: Three Stages of School Improvement

	Scope	*Tasks*
Stage One	Refine: Initiate the process	Organize Responsible Parties Use effectiveness criteria Improve social climate of education
Stage Two	Renovate: Establish the process	Expand scope of improvement Embed staff development Improve curriculum areas
Stage Three	Redesign: Expand the scope	Examine mission of school Study technologies Scrutinize organizational structure Develop long-term plan

Source: Joyce and others 1983, p. 7

gies are introduced at this point, along with increasing amounts and types of staff development" (p. 7). In stage 3, the overall mission of the school is examined and consideration is given to a range of curricular and instructional choices. In summing up their process of school improvement Joyce and colleagues conclude:

> In essence, our focus is on creating environments that promote continuous examination of school effectiveness at local sites so that specific, deliberated improvements can be made. Schools are social entities and, like the human spirit, require the challenge of improvement not only to soar but to maintain themslves.... School improvement thrives only as life in schools is infected by adventure and tested by challenge. (p. 11)

Joyce and his coauthors acknowledge that the challenge facing their approach to school improvement, and indeed all attempts at change, focuses on the problem of innovation—bringing about changes. For educational change, regardless of its potential benefits, faces many obstacles from central office personnel, principals, teachers, and community members. However, the authors argue for "sensible school improvements" that can be routinely implemented (p. 62).

To prepare for school improvement, change agents must remember that "hard work, patience, and satisfaction with gradual progress" will provide for successful change (p.78).

Joyce and his colleagues argue for establishing a homeostasis of change:

> Because homeostatic forces are more powerful than innovative forces at every level of education, ad hoc structures have to be created to promote innovation and to protect against homeostatic forces. In the absence of an executive role that promotes innovation, the necessary conditions (vertical solidarity, ownership, marshaling of resources, development of training, and community involvement) have to be created each time a decision to innovate is made and these conditions have to be sustained if the innovation is to persist.
>
> The condition that must be created is a homeostasis of change, a condition in which organizational stability actually depends on the continuous process of school improvement. (p. 79)

Institutional Conditions

For educational innovation to become possible on a regular basis, the authors say, four conditions must be developed within the institution:

Instruction-Related Executive Functions. That is, the district office has to take direct responsibility for educational programs within schools and exercise curricular and instructional leadership. However, the Responsible Parties must have the authority to implement curriculum and instruction choices.

Collegial Teaching Units. The authors argue for the development of teaching units in which teachers would work together to make decisions, receive instructions, and improve one another's competence.

Continuous Staff Development. Like professionals in other fields, it is argued that teachers should be provided with the opportunities to continuously be exposed to new technologies and given the training to implement them.

Continuous Community Involvement. The authors believe that the powerful forces displayed by the external system serve to prevent educational change. Furthermore, they argue that political manipulation cannot, and should not, be used to overcome resistance to change efforts. Rather, the community should be closely involved in the organization of the curriculum, and should serve on councils with teachers and administrators charged with the responsibility of moderating curricular changes.

Joyce and his colleagues caution their readers against concluding that any single approach to school improvement will guarantee success, and that time to embed the improvement process in the culture of the school is a critical component:

> No single strategy is likely to bring about greater effectiveness in schools. Greater executive authority, stronger staff development, increased community and teacher participation, and collegiality among teachers are all valuable, but none of them, taken alone, will create an atmosphere sufficient to support sensible decision making or resource mastery. We must use all of them....
>
> The context of the district cannot be overemphasized. A district which provides encouragement for school improvement and the conditions that facilitate it will make the work of the Responsible Parties much easier.... We will say over and over again that a school that is not improving is almost surely deteriorating. (p. 82)

Onward to Excellence

Robert Blum and Jocelyn Butler (1987) are major proponents of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) Onward to Excellence (OTE) school improvement program. OTE has been developed and refined since 1982 and has steadily gained popularity in the Pacific Northwest. The school improvement process is presented to school leaders through a training program spanning two years. Schools contract with NWREL for the training, materials, and supportive technical assistance.

Guiding Concepts

OTE is intended to provide schools with a systematic, research-based approach to the improvement of student performance. According to Blum and Butler, "OTE provides a way for schools to move from effectiveness (all students master basic priority objectives) to excellence (most students achieve well beyond basic priority objectives)" (p. 1). Building on the effective schools research base, the NWREL identified "key concepts" that guided the OTE school improvement program:

- Improvements are tied to student performance, and changes in student performance are indicators of the effectiveness of school improvement efforts.
- The school is the appropriate unit for improvement efforts. Changes that improve student performance should take place at the school level.
- School improvement must be managed.
- Improvements should be based on research results.
- There should be an emphasis on improvement. No matter how good a school is, there is always room for improvement that will take place over time.

- Improvement should take place on a schoolwide basis, involving all staff. (p. 2)

Ten-Step Process

Onward to Excellence follows a ten-step cyclical process that is portrayed graphically in figure 1. The steps are summarized as follows:

1. Getting Started. A fundamental belief of OTE is that joint involvement of principals, teachers, and district personnel in a school improvement effort increases the possibility of the success of the program. Using this approach, a leadership team at the local school level plans and manages the implementation of school improvement efforts.

2. Learn about Research. The leadership team studies the effective schools research to gain knowledge about effective schooling practices before sharing these insights with their school staff.

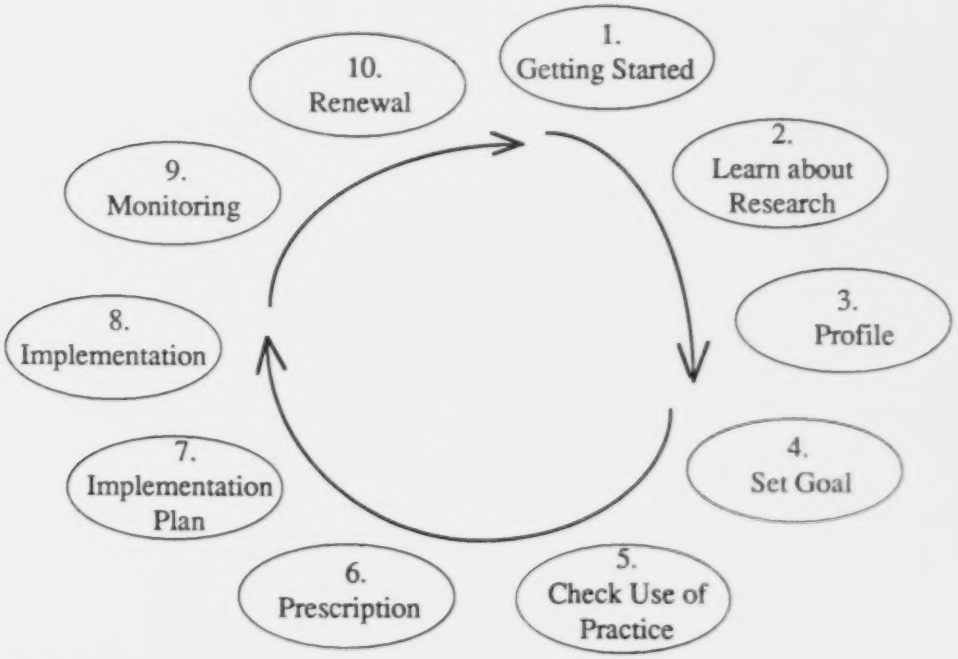
3. Profile. Before a school can plan for improvement, there is a need to know the current status of student performance: academic achievement, attitudes, and social behavior. The leadership team collects data about these aspects of student performance and summarizes the information into the school "Profile."

4. Set Goal. At this stage in the school improvement process, the leadership team involves the entire staff in the identification of a schoolwide goal. The staff base their decisions on the data presented in the school profile, an integral step of the improvement process.

5. Check Use of Practice. The leadership team collects data about the degree to which effective schooling practices currently exist in the school. This information is summarized and presented to the entire staff to use as the basis for making decisions regarding schoolwide strengths and weaknesses.

6. Prescription. Based on the establishment of a school goal and the identification of current practices, the leadership team reviews the effec-

Figure 1: Onward to Excellence—School Improvement Process



Source: Blum and Butler 1987

tive schools research and selects instructional methods that can contribute to improved student performance in the goal area.

7. Implementation Plan. The leadership team develops a plan for implementing the selected effective schooling practices, and copies are distributed to all staff members.

8. Implementation. The new practices are implemented in the school.

9. Monitoring. The leadership team is responsible for monitoring the progress of activities specified in the plan and for adherence, by the staff, to the overall prescription of improvement. Similarly, the team monitors student performance in order to identify the impact of the improvements.

10. Renewal. Following the first cycle of improvement, the staff review results and identify strengths and weaknesses of the improvement plan and recommend ways to improve the process. Decisions are made about whether or not to continue with the existing goal or to move onto a new area.

Program Development Evaluation

Gary Gottfredson and Denise Gottfredson (1987) have argued for organizational development approaches to school improvement. Specifically, they have described Program Development Evaluation (PDE) as a structure for school improvement. The Gottfredsons contend that PDE differs from most other models of school improvement in the following ways:

> First, it uses "theory" as one of the bases for defining programs, selecting interventions, and evaluating progress; and the method itself is based on a theory of organizational effectiveness. Theory plays a central role in the PDE method because it clarifies objectives and focuses program development on a variety of alternative interventions directed at school objectives while excluding irrelevant interventions, and it provides a basis for day-to-day decision making in circumstances where no well developed plans exist.
>
> A second difference between PDE and related methods is that PDE calls for more detailed attention to the problem of implementation. (p. 2)

The authors claim that PDE deals with implementation issues accompanying the adoption of interventions by focusing on the culture of the school, developing specific plans for the adoption of innovations, and incorporating specific mechanisms to monitor the fidelity with which innovations are implemented.

The use of the PDE method involves considering the "organizational culture" surrounding a school improvement effort; like other organizational development approaches, it provides a structure for coping with, and manipulating, the adoption and implementation of innovations. In applying PDE, researchers collaborate with school personnel to

- define problems and set measurable organizational goals
- specify theories of action on which to base school improvement
- define measurable objectives linked to the theory of action
- select interventions
- identify and plan to overcome obstacles to the implementation of interventions
- develop detailed plans including benchmarks to monitor progress in implementation
- specify implementation standards (p.3)

An integral component of PDE is the collaboration between practitioners and researchers in evaluation of school improvement efforts. An information and feedback system is established that provides data used to refine innovations and to determine whether programs are being implemented as planned and achieving the anticipated outcomes. "The process is intended to be helical—planning and program development become part of the everyday routine in the organization, creating a spiral of improvement" (p.4).

The Gottfredsons also identify the following conditions that they believe contribute to making schools conducive to organizational development interventions:

- A spirit of collaboration exists.
- The administration is supportive of the intervention.

- The school does not have a history of one failed innovation after another.
- The entire staff is involved in the decision to participate in the project.
- Staff morale or teacher sense of efficacy appears to be an important factor in the adoption of school improvement programs. (p. 5)

Following an illustrative case of a "school with difficult problems," the Gottfredsons outline a list of general principles they believe might form a good starting point for school improvement:

1. Improvement efforts are enhanced when teachers and administrators share clearly understood goals and understand the rationale for adopting new programs.
2. The greater the benefits from a new program, the more likely participants are to use them and persist in doing so.
3. Schools are more likely to become better and safer places if information about impediments to implementation is encouraged and applied.
4. Innovation is more likely to be successful when explicit plans for the adoption of new programs are available.
5. Guidelines providing concrete guidance in the adoption of new programs increase the chances of success.
6. Availability of resources is critical to the adoption of new programs.
7. Participants in an improvement effort need to be encouraged by others in the school or district who observe their attempts at program adoption.
8. A structured approach to school improvement will foster the emergence of these conditions. (p. 11)

School-Based Improvement

Barbara Hansen and Carl Marburger (1988) have developed a manual for school-based improvement (SBI) for the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE) that is built on the belief that parents and citizens should take a more active role in the governance of schools. The authors describe two prerequisites for those persons who take responsibility for school-based improvement efforts:

- A belief that lasting educational improvement requires a major restructuring of the enterprise, not simply adding another program to those already in existence
- A belief that in some way they can influence the power structure within the district to permit the restructuring to occur (p. 10)

The authors describe the development of the SBI model as follows:

> From a pilot program with five schools in New Jersey we discovered something very important: changing the decision making structure of a school or district isn't enough to create sustained, focused school improvement. For that to happen, local school decision-making groups, usually called school councils, need to learn how to get and use information—data on their own schools as well findings from high quality studies in education. Now, instead of emphasizing school based management, NCCE works with districts in instituting school based improvement, with democratic decision making as a major element in the process. (Hansen and Marburger 1988, p. 11)

Some features of the school-based improvement model promoted by the NCCE are as follows:

- Training district SBI facilitators to work with local school councils
- Involving parents in school improvement
- Providing extensive and ongoing training of council members
- Clarifying decision making roles through the negotiation of a memoranda of agreement
- Providing councils with a tested agenda for school improvement by linking their efforts to the research on effective schools (p. 11)

Characteristics and Beliefs

The authors maintain that school-based improvement is a process that requires political decentralization and shared decision-making, and while the specifics of SBI may vary from school to school, all applications of the program have

three common characteristics: a management philosophy, an educational strategy, and an organizational structure. Among the beliefs on which SBI has been founded are the following:

- Without bureaucratic interference, decisions are made more swiftly at the local level.
- It's easier to change people's behavior than to alter their beliefs.
- When people work together on common concerns, they lose the sense of being in separate camps.
- The resources needed for school improvement are already in the school community. All we must do is release the energy that is now constrained.
- Parents are important contributors to the educational success of their children.
- Involving students in decision making gives them an opportunity to become responsible members of a democratic society. (p. 15)

Hansen and Marburger also maintain that teachers, as the persons closest to school activities, are in the best position to have reliable opinions and judgments about school improvement activities and should be the ones to decide the best way to perform their duties:

> All parties to the enterprise are strengthened by the SBI process. When we empower others, we become empowered. When superintendents trust principals and staffs to make more significant decisions about what happens at their school, the superintendent has not lost power or authority but has gained the strength of a united and trusting faculty. When teachers trust the principal to act in the best interest of both the students and themselves, that principal, by empowering them, has now become stronger that he or she could ever be as the sole decision maker. (p. 17)

Barriers to Success

Hansen and Marburger report that evaluations of SBI efforts show that success comes when participants see themselves as gaining power rather than losing it. Some of the barriers to success encountered by SBI include lack of school control over budgets, insufficient administrative and leadership support, little teacher involvement in and commitment to the process, and too little time allowed for the process to succeed.

School Improvement Process

Jill Casner-Lotto (1988) has described a School Improvement Process (SIP) being used in the public schools in Hammond, Indiana. Casner-Lotto outlines the structure of the SIP as follows:

> A SIP, which draws on the collective energy and expertise of teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other community members, is fundamentally changing the way schools operate and enhancing opportunities for learning.
>
> For the first time, teachers in Hammond can have a major say in decision making and in shaping educational programs that they believe will be best suited to their students. (p. 349)

The decision-making involving teachers now includes involvement in tasks previously undertaken by principals and adminstrators: curriculum planning and development, instructional strategies, staffing needs, professional development, disciplinary procedures, scheduling, and so forth. All these activities are condoned by the local Hammond Teachers' Federation.

According to Casner-Lotto, participants in the Hammond SIP define it as "a building-based method of managing schools that can lead to significant improvements in the quality of education" (p. 350). Central to the SIP are several beliefs held by district teachers and administrators:

- that decision making remains school-based
- that those persons most closely affected by decisions should have a major role in making them
- that reforms are most effective when carried out by personnel who have ownership of them

Planning of the improvement process commences with participants' identifying the key

elements for an effective improvement plan. Included in the list of factors are training, time, money, ongoing district support, and access to current or state-of-the-art information on which to base decisions. However, Casner-Lotto acknowledges that there has not been a uniform implementation of the SIP in Hammond's schools due to the idiosyncratic nature of schools: each school adapts the process to meet its own culture and desired pace of change.

The school improvement process at each site is facilitated through the development of building-based improvement committees consisting of fifteen to twenty members, including teachers, adminstrators, parents, students, and other community members. The focus for the group is set by a smaller executive committee usually consisting of the principal, one or two teachers, and a parent. Interestingly, Casner-Lotto warns that "the principal should never chair the SIP committee, because this would merely perpetuate the traditional top-down approach to school improvement" (p. 351).

Following initial training at the school level by the district's school improvement facilitator, the first task of the SIP team is to develop a "vision of excellence"—a statement of the team's goals for the next five or ten years. "Specific long- and short-range goals and priorities are determined, and then a strategic improvement plan is developed" (p. 351). Casner-Lotto describes a central theme of the Hammond SIP:

> A key component of the SIP is the concept of "pyramiding," which, when done properly, increases the number of people who have input into decision making and thus increases the acceptance of new programs and policies. Pyramiding requires that each member of the SIP team interact regularly with five to seven peers. This interaction consists of communicating information about the team's work or about a specific proposal and gathering feedback from interested parties who are not members of the team. Each member of the initial group of five to seven individuals is then expected to reach a similar number of people, who, in turn, contact others. In this way, a significant portion of the school population can be reached in a relatively short time. (p. 351)

Common Characteristics

This chapter has provided a brief overview of five models of school improvement: The Structure of School Improvement, Onward to Excellence, Program Development Evaluation, School-Based Improvement, and School Improvement Process. Several characteristics common to the approaches can be indentified.

First, the participants in school improvement efforts include teachers, principals, district administrators, parents, community members, and possibly students. All these programs involve staff on a schoolwide basis and promote collaboration among researchers and school personnel.

Second, to overcome the stability that exists in schools, the programs accept the notion that there is always room for improvement. This has been expressed in terms of creating a school culture that allows for the establishment of school improvement activities—the "homeostasis" of school improvement as described by Joyce and his colleagues (1983), or a "spiral" of improvement as characterized by the Gottfredsons (1987).

Third, several key stages in the school improvement process can be observed:

- Initiate the process by defining the problem and identifying the key elements of the school effectiveness research that will help in the development of an improvement plan.
- Establish the process of school improvement in the school "culture" and plan to improve identified curriculum areas. Include long-range goals and a "vision of excellence." Also plan to overcome the obstacles to school improvement.
- Implement the improvement plan involving teachers, students, parents, community members, with the help of supportive district administrators.
- Monitor the implementation of the improvement plan and make any necessary adjustments to the plan to facilitate the process.
- Evaluate the improvement effort against implementation standards through an information and feedback system.
- Renew the school improvement process

involving the "responsible parties" and decide on a new school focus.

And finally, the programs are alike in acknowledging that several conditions contribute to successful school improvement efforts:

- A spirit of collaboration exists among the participants in a school improvement effort. District administrators exercise leadership in curriculum and instruction matters while school-level personnel have the authority to implement choices.
- School improvement efforts should be research-based with links to the literature on school effectiveness.
- Decision-making should be school-based with the school as the unit of change.
- The more benefits experienced by the users of an innovation, the more likely they are to persist with its use.

Making Decisions about School Improvement: Steps to Action

In this final chapter our attention turns to some recommendations for school improvement that should be considered by the "responsible parties" as they negotiate the model of school improvement that will best meet their needs. Assisting in this decision-making process is the accompanying matrix of school improvement models (table 2), which highlights key characteristics of the school improvement models described in this paper.

Qualifying Assumptions

Several assumptions about school improvement should temper any decisions about how to proceed with the process. That is, adoption of a model of school improvement, or an eclectic approach agreed upon by the "responsible parties," does not necessarily guarantee improvement. Change must occur at the school level where "working together becomes the new norm of the school culture" (Lieberman and Rosenholtz 1987, p. 87).

Similarly, Karen Seashore Louis (1989) has identified three assumptions concerning school improvement at the district level that should be considered. First, school improvement is a multilevel process that typically requires the cooperation of actors at different levels in the educational system, ranging from central office administrators, principals, teachers, students, and parents up through policymakers, and perhaps even the representatives of political parties.

Second, effective school improvement is a planned process that develops slowly, often over a period of a decade or more. Policies that do not propose a strategy for managing the slow process of change are less likely to succeed than those that do.

And third, strategies for managing the improvement process are incompletely designed and evolve over time. Thus, the process of school improvement is inherently unstable and dynamic (for further discussion, see Louis 1989, p. 146).

These assumptions ought to temper the deliberations of parties undertaking a school improvement effort. That is, in making decisions about selecting a school improvement model, or applying the recommendations made in this paper, participants should make adjustments to the strategies they employ in light of the underlying assumptions inherent in the school improvement process: change must occur at the school level, requiring the cooperation of "actors" at all levels; it involves a planned process that evolves slowly over time; and it must establish a school culture that encourages working together.

Recommendations

The following seven recommendation—drawn from the models of school improvement discussed in this paper—can help school districts in their efforts to improve instructional programs:

1. Foster an attitude favorable to change. Look at ways to develop an attitude of "there is always room for improvement" in the district. Promote a school culture that allows for regular school improvement activities—the "homeostasis" of school improvement, or a "spiral" of improvement. Changing school culture is not an event that will yield immediate results. Rather, it is a process that may evolve over many years.

2. Broaden the range of participants in the school improvement process. Many school districts rely solely on the skills of the central office personnel, principals, and teachers. Including the district's parents, community members, and students in efforts to improve instructional programs may extend the available resources. However, this step necessitates a trusting relationship between schools and community.

3. Initiate the school improvement process by defining the problem and identifying key ele-

Table 2: Characteristics of Models of School Improvement

	Provides for Ongoing School Improvement	Involves Broad Range of Participants	Initiates Process by Defining the Problem	States Long-Range Goals	Includes Information /Feedback Systems	Anticipates Obstacles	Fosters a Spirit of Collaboration
The Structure of School Improvement	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Onward to Excellence	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔
Program Development Evaluation	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
School-Based Improvement		✔	✔				✔
School Improvement Process		✔	✔	✔			✔

ments of the school effectiveness research that will help in the development of an improvement plan. Administrators must provide leadership and support in areas of curriculum and instruction by involving the district's "responsible parties" in identifying and defining problems.

4. Write a "Vision of Excellence"—a statement of long-range goals—decided upon by the "responsible parties."

5. Develop an information and feedback system to monitor the implementation of improvement plans, and make any necessary adjustments to the plan to facilitate the process.

6. Anticipate obstacles to the school improvement effort and plan to overcome them. Through early planning, the school district can be proactive in combatting problems commonly faced by school improvement efforts. For example, ensure that schools receive the necessary financial support and administrative leadership needed for successful school improvement.

7. Promote a spirit of collaboration among participants in the school improvement effort. While it is important for district administrators to provide leadership in curriculum and instruction matters, it is also important that school-level personnel have the authority to implement choices.

Given the situation that exists in many school districts, and the synthesis of school improvement models and literature on educational change, I would propose that the lessons discussed here may contribute to the success of future school improvement programs. Clearly, these recommendations would not ameliorate all the obstacles facing school improvement efforts in school districts around the country. Problems with school improvement are the concern of all the participants and require cooperation at all levels. Without such cooperation, I believe that school improvement will continue to be an elusive dream.

District personnel undertaking school im-

provement efforts need to be aware of the variety of models that exist and be prepared to make decisions concerning the process that will facilitate their efforts. Every approach has its costs and benefits, and the "responsible parties" must decide how best to minimize their losses. But perhaps the most important lessons relate to the very essence of school improvement; it is a process that takes place over an extended time and necessitates a change in the culture of the school. In an institution that is inherently stable, the culture needs to allow for the establishment of school improvement activities as regular components of the daily functioning of schools.

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